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ABSTRACT

A study compared functional similarities and differences in the passive in English and Korean, examining several pragmatics theories (given/new information, theme-rheme structure, foregrounding/backgrounding, defocusing, role prominence, emotional function) for their explanations of the functions of the passives. It is concluded that there is a relative similarity in discourse functions of the passive in English and Korean, since the passive can be accounted for best in the two languages by the theory of role prominence. Great difference was found in the emotional function of the passive in the sense that emotional function is much more pervasive in Korean than in English. Implications for learning the passive in English are considered briefly. Contains 18 references. (MSE)

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A Contrastive Discourse Analysis of Passives in English and Korean[1]

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This paper compares functional similarities and differences of the passive between English and Korean. It is shown that there is a relative similarity in discourse functions of the passive since the passive in both languages can be best accounted for in terms of the concept of role prominence. It is also shown that there is a significant difference in emotional function of the passive in the sense that emotional function is much more pervasive in Korean than in English.

While there have been a variety of functional analyses of the English passive, efforts to account for the functional aspects of the Korean passive have been limited. The few such functional studies on the Korean passive (e.g. Abasolo 1974) cannot give a satisfactory account since they fail to explain all aspects of the passives, as will be shown in this paper.

In what follows, I compare functional similarities and differences of the passive between English and Korean. In order to do this, it is important to examine and criticize different pragmatic theories for explaining functions of the passives and establish an approach which has the most explanatory power.

1. Passives and given-new information

It has been often argued that given vs. new information structure serves to explain the use of the passive. Chafe (1970), using English data, and Abasolo (1974), using Korean data, argue that the patient of the passive normally conveys old information,

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while the agent normally conveys new information.

However, the given-new distinction does not always handle all passives. Consider the following example:

(1) A headband for migraines? The idea came from patients pressing on their temples to help ease pain, said Dr. Vijayan, a neurologist and headache specialist in Sacramento, Calif. He developed the band as a way to apply continuous pressure. Firm rubber discs can also be inserted to put more localized pressure on areas of maximum pain. (*Reader's Digest, p.76 Feb. 1994*)

(2) a. Cinan pam-say Pusan-eyse cipcung howu-ka naylyessta.
last night Pusan-in heavy rain-SM[2] fell

b. I-lo inhay kaok-kwa tolo-ka chimsu-toy-ko
this-because of house-and roads-SM flood-**PASS**-and

c. hangkongki unhang-i kumci -toy - essta.
plane flying-SM prohibit-**PASS**-PAST

'(a) All through the last night, in Pusan, there has been heavy rain. (b) Because of this, *houses and roads* have been flooded and (c) *plane-flying* has been prohibited.'
(Newspaper, *Hangukilbo, p.9, June, 15, 1995*)

In example (1) the subject of the passive, "Firm rubber discs," conveys *brand-new* information, in Prince's (1980) terms, rather than given information, contrary to what is generally claimed for passive subjects.

In example (2), too, the subjects of the two passives, "houses and roads" in (b) and "plane-flying" in (c), convey new information rather than given information in the sense that they have been mentioned for the first time. This demonstrates that passives cannot always be understood in terms of given vs. new information.

In addition, the given-new approach in associating newness with the agent phrase fails to recognize that the agentless passive

is the most common type of passive in English and Korean.

2. Passives and theme-rheme (topic-comment) structure

It has been widely claimed (e.g. Mathesius 1975, Firbas 1966, Givon 1981) that passivization is a means of placing the thematic component at the beginning of the sentence, and placing the rhematic component at the end. In other words, the patient of the passive is thematic and the agent, when included, is rhematic.

However, several linguists (e.g. Firbas 1966, Riddle & Sheintuch 1983) have argued that the subject of the passive is not always clearly the theme. In fact, the subject may be rhematic rather than thematic. For instance, in example (1) above, the underlined subject of the passive has a significant degree of Communicative Dynamism' (hereafter CD) since it was not mentioned earlier and contributes greatly to the total amount of information. Thus it is rhematic rather than thematic, contrary to the normal distribution of the theme-rheme approach.

In a study of the Korean passive, Kim (1983) considers the Korean passive a syntactic device for topic (or theme) realization, saying that it enables the object to occupy the topic position. However, as in English, the Korean passive cannot always be accounted for in terms of the notion of topic/theme:

(3) Choki chengtongki sitayuy yumul-un, cakipyen-i
early Bronze Age's heritage-TOP, porcelain-SM

manhi chwultho-toy-e wassta. Kulena, ipenenun
many excavate-PASS-have been. But, this time

chengtong pulsang-i chwultho-toy-e
bronze Buddha statue-SM excavate-**PASS**-and

hakkeyuy kwansim-ul moukoissta.
Society's attention-OM draw
As for the early Bronze Age's heritage, many porcelains have been excavated. But, this time a bronze Buddha statue was excavated and (it) is drawing the Society's attention.
(Newspaper, *Hangukilbo, p.16, Aug. 31, 1995*)

In the sentence with the underlined passive, the topic, "a bronze Buddha statue" conveys a greater degree of CD than the comment, "was excavated," which was already mentioned. This is contrary to what is normally assumed in terms of the topic-comment structure. Thus, a passive like this weakens the validity of the topic-comment approach to the Korean passive.

Despite the fact that the theme-rheme (topic-comment) approach does not account for all the passives in either language, it plays a role in explaining the passive. The topicalization concerning the passives is much stronger in English than in Korean. This can be explained in terms of Li & Thompson's typology (1976), which indicates that English is a subject-prominent language, while Korean is a both subject- and topic-prominent language. In a subject-prominent language like English, the passive serves as an important device to topicalize a non-agent NP and avoid the agent, but in a topic-prominent language like Korean, topicalization and agent avoidance are also made possible by other devices such as morphological markers and zero-anaphora.

3. Passives and foregrounding-backgrounding

Some linguists relate the passive to foregrounding vs.

backgrounding structure. Hopper & Thompson (1980) note that passives are not high in transitivity and tend to occur in the background events. In a similar vein, Wallace (1982) suggests that the passive serves to encode background information, as opposed to the active, which usually foregrounds.

However, neither Hopper and Thompson nor Wallace gives any specific arguments and discourse examples to justify their position. Consider the following discourse examples:

(4) With the young woman playing the clinging ivy to his oak Soapy walked past the policeman, overcome with gloom. He seemed doomed to liberty.
    At the next corner he shook his companion and ran. He halted in the district where by night <u>are found</u> the lightest streets, hearts, vows, and librettos. Women in furs and men in greatcoats moved gaily in the wintry air.
    (O. Henry, *The Cop and the Anthem*)

(5) Biff: Why don't you let me finish?
    Willy: I'm not interested in stories about the past... There's a big blaze going on all around. <u>I was fired today</u>.
    Biff: (shocked) How could you be?
    Willy: <u>I was fired</u>, and I'm looking for a little good news to tell your mother....
    (Arther Miller, *Death of a Salesman*)

In example (4), the first paragraph describes how Soapy, who intends to commit a crime in order to spend the cold winter in a warm prison, fails to do it. This is a main-line event. However, the second paragraph simply describes the night scene of the streets, which has little to do with the story development. The passive, used in such a situation, thus functions as background.

However, in example (5), taken from *Death of a Salesman*, Willy's being fired has surprising effects upon the readers and is

an important event in the development of the play, although it is less significant information than the salesman's death. If the salesman's death is viewed as peak information, his being fired can be viewed as foreground information.

As seen in the examples above, the English passive does not always encode background information. Sometimes it encodes background information and sometimes foreground information.

Let us consider Korean examples with passives:

(6) Yesnaley Kimchampong-ila-pul-li-unun
once upon a time Kimchampong-be-call-**PASS**-REL

kananhan senpi-ka salkoissesssupnita.
poor scholar-SM was living

'Once upon a time, there lived a poor scholar called Kimchampong.'

Example (6) is a typical example of the beginning of traditional Korean stories. Where background information, such as main characters, is introduced, the passive is used. In many other cases, too, the passive is used to convey background information.

However, sometimes the passive is also used to convey foreground information in Korean. Consider:

(7) "Ca, onul-un pak-ul thapo-cakkuna."...Hungpu-wa
well, today-TOP gourd-OM cut-lets'. Hungpu-and

anay-nun culkewun topcil-ul sicakhaysseyo...Tudie
wife-TOP joyful sowing-OM began finally

pak-i kalla-ci-esseyo. "Ah, pak-sokey ssal-i!"
gourd-SM cut-**PASS**-PAST. Oh, gourd-in rice-SM

Aitul-un noll-a woichiesseyo....
children-TOP surprise and cried....

"Well, let's cut the gourd. Hungpu and (his) wife began joyful sowing....Finally, the gourd was cut. "Oh! (there is) rice in the gourd!" (Their) children were surprised and cried (with joy). (Folk tale, *Hungpuwa Nolpu*)

In example (7), the previous context is that the good Hungpu family kindly treated a swallow whose leg was broken. In return, the swallow gave a seed of a gourd to the Hungpu family. The Hungpu family grew it. In the above description (7), they cut the gourd and found rice in the gourd, which made them live happily. The passive used in this happy-ending event conveys foreground information since it conveys a dramatic effect and it is on the main-line event which advances the story.

As shown above, Wallace's claim that the passive encodes background information does not consistently work for the English and Korean passives, since it sometimes encodes background information and sometimes foreground information.

4. Passives and defocusing

Shibatani (1985:830) claims that "passives center around agents, and the *primary* [emphasis mine] function of the passives is that of 'agent defocusing.'" Shibatani's notion of agent defocusing seems to involve three reasons for the use of the English passive proposed by Jesperson (1924):

a. 'The active subject is unknown or cannot easily be said.'
b. 'The active subject is self-evident from the context.'
c. 'There may be a special reason for not mentioning the active subject.'

In Korean, a socio-cultural factor is also relevant to the

notion of agent defocusing. Consider:

(8) Context: A and B are both Korean male students studying in America. A is a little (one year) older than B. A is married, but B is not. They have not known each other long. They are kind of friendly, but not much.

A: (Sighing) Onul kipun-i cocci-an-ne.
today feeling-SM good-not-is
'Today (my) feeling is not good.'

B: ssau-si-esse-yo? animyen cansoli-tulu-si-ess-eyo?
quarrel-HON-PAST-QM or complain-**PASS**-HON-PAST-QM
'Did (you) quarrel with (your wife) or were you complained?'

In such a context, the omission of overt reference to the wife is common usage. If speaker B were much older than A, he could use nehuy cipsalam 'your wife.' If B were far younger than A and were very friendly with A, he could use hyengswunim 'the honorific form of sister-in-law.' However, since B is in an ambiguous relation with A in terms of age and familiarity, he avoids the agent.

The agent defocusing function plays an important role in explaining the agentless passive in both English and Korean. However, Shibatani's claim that agent defocusing is the primary function of the passives is too strong, since it fails to explain the agentive passives in the two languages. Furthermore, it pays little attention to the patient NP: why the patient of the passive is placed in the subject position and what role it plays. Failure to do this weakens the explanatory power of agent defocusing.

5. Passives and role-prominence

Some linguists (e.g. Schachter 1977, Riddle & Sheintuch 1983) argue that the passive can be best understood in terms of the

concept of *role prominence*, which is defined as the property associated with the participant(s) that the speaker views as "being at the center of events in the situation being described" (Riddle & Sheintuch 1983:546).

Riddle and Sheintuch claim that all and only NPs referring to role prominent participants occur as passive/pseudo-passive subjects. However, they concentrate on pseudo-passives with little attention to canonical passives. Earlier, Schachter (1977) only briefly comments on the application of his concept of role prominence to the analysis of canonical passives without giving discourse examples. Consider these discourse examples:

(9) Middle-aged or older, most of us hadn't practiced in years. We couldn't fit into the uniforms let alone march the full length of the field. *Old instruments* had been lifted from dusty cases and polished to perfection. *Wrinkled sheets of long buried music*....were taken out and fastened in our lyres. (*Reader's Digest, p.38, July, 1991*)

(10) Sheila made things happen by the sheer force of her personality. Once, when her car hit a large pothole and no road repairs were made despite her repeated calls, Sheila painted a huge white circle around the hole, lettered the word *Pothole* and dabbed a giant arrow below it. Next she called the local newspaper and told them of a photo opportunity at that spot. The pothole was repaired the same way the picture appeared in the paper.
(*Reader's Digest, p.100-101, Feb. 1991*)

Example (9) shows that the theme-rheme approach is not helpful. The passive subjects, *Old instruments* and *Wrinkled sheets of long buried music*, contrary to the theme-rheme approach, convey a significant degree of CD, since they have not been mentioned before and represent new information. The notion of role prominence works better here, since it focuses on who or what plays the most

prominent role in the situation described rather than on newness vs. givenness, per se. Since in this situation music equipment needed for a marching band is at the center of attention, with respect to the agents, the instruments can be passive subjects.

Example (10) is another example where the theme-rheme approach does not work well. In the underlined passive sentence, it is difficult to distinguish degrees of CD between the passive subject and the verb, because both have already been mentioned. This dilemma can be resolved by the concept of role prominence. In this situation the passive subject, "the pothole," plays a more prominent role than the deleted agent, since our attention is not focused on who repaired the pothole, but on the pothole itself.

Consider Korean passives in terms of role prominence:

(11) Hankwuk-ul pangmwunhal-ttaymata na-lul
Korea-OM visit -whenever I-OM

tanghwang-khe ha-nun kes-un kongcung pyenso-ey
embarrass- CAUS -REL-thing-TOP public restroom-in

hywuci-ka pichi-toy-ci anhko isstanunteyissta.
toilet paper provide-**PASS**-not is

'Whenever (I) visit Korea, the thing that embarrasses me is that in the public restrooms toilet paper is not provided.' (Kim Ockyo Essay, *Hoicenmokma 'Merry-go-round'*)

This example shows that the theme-rheme approach to the passive is not adequate. In the passive sentence, there is a difficulty determinging the degree of CD and newness between the theme (*the toilet paper*) and the rheme (*is not provided*), since both have not been mentioned before. This is not congruent with the theme-rheme approach that the theme conveys less degree of CD and newness than

the rheme. The difficulty in determining the degree of CD is clearly shown from the whole context, which consists of the Korean cleft structure, where the passive sentence itself is the focus, compared with "the thing which embarrasses me is," which is the presupposition.

This example is, however, clearly accounted for in terms of role prominence, in the sense that the "toilet paper" is role prominent, with little attention to "whoever provides the toilet paper," because the speaker is concerned mainly with the object to be provided.

Consider also the use of the passive in the relative clause:

(12) Kay-nun teisang chamul swu eps-ese, talk-uy
dog-TOP no longer endure cannot-because, fowl's

mok-ul mule pelyesssupnita....Kulente, kay-hanthe
neck-OM bit Then dog-by

ccoc-ki-n talk-un cipung-wuie ollakasssupnita.
chase-**PASS**-REL fowl-TOP roof-on went up

'Because the dog could not endure it any longer, (it) bit the fowl's neck....Then, the fowl who was chased by the dog went up a roof.'
(Folk tale, *Talk ccocten Kay* 'The dog Who Chased the Fowl')

In the English translation of the above passive sentence, the thematic element "the fowl" comes first as the subject, whereas the rhematic element "by the dog" occupies the later position, in accordance with the normal distribution of CD. However, the Korean version of the passive sentence in the relative clause is against the normal distribution of CD, since the rhematic element, kay hanthe 'by the dog' comes earlier than the thematic element, talk

'fowl.' This shows, in part, that the theme-rheme analysis is more problematic for the Korean passive than the English passive.

However, such a problem is resolved in terms of role prominence. The passive is used because the attention is focused on the fowl's action rather than the dog's action after the fowl was bitten by the dog. Thus, the fowl is role prominent in the passive sentence.

The discussion so far reveals that role prominence best accounts for the passive in both English and Korean, since it proves to explain passives which cannot be accounted for in terms of other approaches such as theme-rheme status.

6. Passives and emotional function

In this section, I compare how passives can express emotions or subjective feelings in English and Korean. Some linguists (Lakoff 1971, Chappell 1980) note that the GET-passive expresses a sense of affectiveness (adversative or favorable). Consider:

(13) Jane {was/got} fired.
(14) Vienamese women and children {were/*got} massacred in the My Lai offensive.

(15) Jane {was/got} promoted.
(16) Einstein {was/*got} awarded a Nobel Prize.

In example (13) the BE-passive is neutral, while the GET-passive is adversative. According to Chappell, in example (14), if the speaker considers the subject an innocent victim of circumstance, then the GET-passive is not appropriate, and the BE-passive must be used instead.

In example (15) the BE-passive is neutral, while the GET-passive is beneficial rather than adversative. In example (16), if the GET-passive is used, it would seem, according to Chappell, that the goal of Einstein's research was to win a Nobel Prize, and thus the use of the GET-passive is unnatural.

However, it is sometimes ambiguous whether a particular sentence should be judged to be adversative or favorable on the sentence level, since a passive with an apparently adversative connotation on the sentence level may actually be seen to be favorable on the discourse level. For example, "Soapy got himself arrested" has an adversative connotation on the sentence level. Suppose that this sentence is used in O. Henry's short story, "The Cop and the Anthem," where Soapy intentionally tries to commit crimes several times to spend the cold winter in a warm prison, but he fails to be caught by the police. In this context, if the sentence, "Soapy got himself arrested," is used, the GET-passive reflects a favorable connotation rather than adversative, on the part of Soapy. This suggests that in order to fully understand the meaning of the GET-passive, not only the sentence level but also contexts should be considered.

On the other hand, the emotional (affective) function is more pervasive in the Korean passive. Davison (1980:58), citing Lee (1974), states that Korean has a set of 'irregular' passive suffixes which convey an adversative or favorable effect. Davison goes on to say that the passive forms <u>mac</u> 'be subject to,' <u>tangha</u> 'be subject to,' and <u>tut</u> 'catch' convey an adversative effect,

while the passive form pat 'received' expresses a beneficial effect. However, the pat-passive can also express the adversative implication:

(17) a. salang-hata 'love' → salang-pat-ta 'be loved'
chingchan-hata 'praise' → chingchan-pat-ta 'be praised'
b. pinan-hata 'blame' → pinan-pat-ta 'be blamed'
ekap-hata 'pressure' → ekap-pat-ta 'be pressured'

The pat-passives in (a) are beneficial, but those in (b) are adversative. This instance suggests that the pat-passive does not necessarily express a beneficial effect, but can also express an adversative one.

The above examples give the impression that the adversative connotation of the lexical passives is determined solely by the meaning of the verb. However, this is not entirely the case. Consider the following set of lexical passives:

(18) a. Tom-un komwun-toy-essta.
Tom-TOP toture-**PASS**-PAST 'Tom was tortured.'

b. Tom-un komwun -pat-assta.
Tom-TOP torture-**PASS**-PAST 'Tom got tortured.'

c. Tom-un komwun-tangha-assta.
Tom-TOP torture-**PASS**-PAST 'Tom was tortured
agaist his wishes'

The same verb komwunhata 'torture' accompanies several types of lexical passives. In (a) the toy-passive is close to neutral, though it has some sort of adversative connotation. In (b) the pat-passive has a little more degree of adversative connotation than the toy-passive. In (c) the tangha-passive has the most negative connotation with the speaker's empathy with the patient of the

passive, since it implies that Tom was tortured despite his innocence. The suggestion that the tangha-passive has the most negative connotation is confirmed by the fact that some verbs whose meanings have a very negative connotation can only take the tangha-passive without taking other types: e.g., *kangkantanghata* 'be raped against one's wishes,' as opposed to **kangkantoyta*, **kangkanpatta*. The above examples show that there are different degrees of adversative connotation, depending on the types of passives in Korean.

Affectiveness is expressed not only by the lexical passives, but also by the affix passives:

(19) Tom-un kyengchal-eykey son-ul cap-hi-essta. (**adversative**)
Tom-TOP police-by hand-OM catch-**PASS**-PAST
'Tom is subject to his hand being caught by the police.'

(20) Na-nun palam-ey sso-i-le ka-ssta. (**beneficial**)
I-TOP breeze-by blow-**PASS**-to go-PAST
Literally: 'I went out to be blown by breeze.'
Intended: 'I went out to enjoy by breeze.'

In the active version of (19) the patient already has some sort of adversative implication, but in the passive (affix passive) the negative connotation is multiplied. The active version of (20) is neutral, but the affix passive (20) has a beneficial effect. These examples show that any passive types such as the lexical and affix passives can express the emotional function in Korean, unlike the limited use of the GET-passive in English.

The fact that the affective use of the passive is more pervasive in Korean than in English is also supported by the following example:

(21) Mary caught a cold.
(21') Mary-nun kamki-e kel-li-essta.
Mary-TOP cold-by catch-PASS-PAST.
'Mary got caught by a cold.'

English expression (21) corresponds to Korean expression (21'). This shows that in the case where the emotional (sympathetic) connotation is reflected, Korean uses the passive even where English uses the active sentence. This suggests, in part, that the affective use of the passive is more pervasive in Korean than in English.

It goes without saying that discourse contexts are required to determine adversative or favorable implications of the passive. However, some passive types such as the tangha-passive almost always convey an adversative connotation either on the sentence or discourse levels. Hence, the emotional (affective) implication of the passive in Korean is somewhat inherent to the meaning of the passive types and less context-dependent than in English.

Conclusion

I have discussed the use of the passive from a functional perspective. I have shown that there is a relative similarity in discourse functions of the passive between English and Korean since the passive in the two languages can be best accounted for in terms of the concept of role prominence. I have also demonstrated a great difference in the emotional (affective) function of the passive, showing that it is more pervasive in Korean than in English, since English expresses subjective feelings usually by means of the GET-

passive, whereas in Korean any type of passive can be used to express subjective feelings or emotions.

It is assumed that such similarity and difference in the functions of English and Korean passives may have a great effect on Korean students' use of the English passive.

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NOTES

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   This paper is also a part of my Ph.D. dissertation, entitled "A Grammatical and Pragmatic Analysis of English Passives in Second Language Acquisition."

2. Abbreviations used in this paper: SM = Subject marker, TOP = Topic marker, OM = Object marker, PAST = Past tense marker, PASS = Passive marker, REL = Relative clause marker, QM = Question sentence marker, HON = Honorific marker.

3. Firbas (1966) uses the notion of Communicative Dynamism (CD), the degree of contribution to the total amount of information that an utterance achieves.

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